

said to be the progenitor of the Japanese race. Shinto mythology describes a confrontation between Amaterasu and her brother Susa-no-o, who is said to have a wicked and deceitful disposition. When he decided to ascend into Heaven, she stopped him and demanded to know what his intentions were. He assured her that he meant no harm, but she did not believe him. In order to ensure that he would remain true to his word, he proposed that both should swear and produce children, which apparently made Susa-no-o keep his promise. A well-known Shinto myth in which Amaterasu decides to hide herself in a cave as a result of the misdeeds of Susa no o. When she enters the cave the world is plunged into darkness, and so the other kami work together to draw her out again. When she leaves the cave, a sacred rope is placed across the entrance to ensure that she will never again conceal her radiance from the world.

Amaterasu is also closely associated with the ruling house of Japan, which claims descent from her. This claim is a part of the official legitimization for the rule of the emperor, who was traditionally believed to be semi-divine. This was expressed in the title of "Living Kami" (*Akitsukami*), which was given to the emperor and implied that he was a direct descendant of Amaterasu. An idea that is common in East Asia

in general, is that natural calamities reflect on the personality and moral character of the ruler and serve as a sign of the displeasure of Heaven. A Shinto story describes that when the ancient emperor Sujin experienced difficulties he asked the kami to explain the cause, and he was informed that he had failed properly to venerate the kami Omononushi. The problems he was experiencing were a manifestation of the kami's displeasure, and the emperor was told that they would end when the emperor provided the appropriate offerings.

SHINTO PRACTICES.

Shinto is not a unified system of beliefs and practices, but rather is a general term that encompasses many different traditions dating from the earliest periods of Japanese history. Some of the elements and practices of Shinto may be derived from the religious lives of Japanese who lived thousands of years ago in prehistoric times, while others are influenced by the imported traditions of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, along with various indigenous practices and beliefs.

For the average contemporary Japanese, Shinto is not primarily concerned with doctrines. Rather, practicing Shinto involves performing actions expected of Japanese people who recognize the existence and power of the kami and who engage in actions traditionally associated with them. In the broadest sense, Shinto includes all the actions—festivals, rituals, prayers, offerings, pilgrimages, etc.—that pertain to the kami.

Because kami are believed to reside throughout the Japanese archipelago, there are shrines to local and national kami scattered throughout the islands, and these are an important focus of Shinto practice. There are between 78,000-79,000 Shinto shrines in Japan today, and

traditional households generally have an altar to the clan deity (*uchigami*), at which regular offerings are presented. This is a prayer spoken by the head priest of the Grand Shrine of Ise during a regular festival performed every six months. It asks Amaterasu to ensure that the emperor has a long life, to protect the country, and to promote the prosperity of the people.

By the solemn command of the Emperor,
[I pray] that you make his life a long life,
Prospering [his reign] as an abundant reign,
Eternal and unmoving as the sacred massed
rocks,
That you favor also the princes which are
born,
That you [protect] long and tranquilly the
various officials,
As well as even the common people of the
lands of the four quarters of the kingdom,
And that you cause to flourish in abundance
The five grains which they harvest.
With the prayer [I offer] the tribute threads
habitually presented by the people of the
Kamube

**Established in the three counties and in the
various lands and various places,**

**And the great wine and the great first fruits
prepared in ritual purity,**

**Placing these in abundance like a long
mountain range.**

**I, the great Nakatomi, abiding concealed
behind the solemn *tama-gusi*,**

**On the seventeenth day of the sixth month
of this year,**

**Do humbly speak your praises as the
morning sun rises in effulgent glory.**

[*Norito*, pp. 60-61]

**Every twenty years the grand shrine of Ise is
rebuilt. There are two sites on which the shrines
are constructed, and builders alternate between
the two. When the time comes to construct a
new shrine, a prayer is spoken to the goddess in
order to inform her that the time has come for
her to move again.**

DEVELOPMENT OF SHINTO.

Prince Shotoku (573-621) is a pivotal figure in Japanese history. He embraced Buddhism and propagated it throughout the country, but in the following edict, issued in 607 during the reign of Empress Suiko, r. 592-628, he continued the ancient practices of venerating the indigenous kami:

'We are told that our imperial ancestors, in governing the nation, bent humbly under heaven and walked softly on earth. They venerated the kami of heaven and earth, and established shrines on the mountains and by the rivers, whereby they were in constant touch with the power of nature. Hence the winter (*yin*, negative cosmic force) and summer (*yang*, positive cosmic force) elements were kept in harmony, and their creative powers blended together. And now during our reign, it would be unthinkable to neglect the veneration of the kami of heaven and earth. May all the ministers from the bottom of their hearts pay homage to the kami of heaven and earth.'[*Nihongi*, ch. 12]

In the modern period, Shinto can be classified into three broad categories, which although distinguishable are interrelated: Shrine Shinto

(Jinja Shinto), Sectarian Shinto (*Kyoha Shinto*), and Folk Shinto (*Minzoku Shinto*). The first type includes rituals and other activities performed at Shinto shrines. It centers on the prayers and offerings addressed to the kami, which are generally expected to lead to specific concrete results, such as material success, health, academic accomplishments, or protection. It is believed that prayers and offerings make the kami positively predisposed toward the people who present them and that the kami in return may grant their requests. The most important deity of Shrine Shinto is Amaterasu, whose main shrine is at Ise. The deities worshipped in Shinto shrines are collectively referred to as "the gods of heaven and earth" (*tenshin chigi*). Rituals and prayers are also offered for the well-being of deceased ancestors and to ensure the peace, stability, and prosperity of the country.

Contemporary Shinto thought commonly contends that ritual actions must be combined with a pure mind, since the kami will only positively respond to people whose thoughts are sincere. In order to gain the blessing and aid of the kami, one must have the "heart of truth" (*makoto no kokoro*) or "true heart" (*magokoro*), which is characterized by reverence for the natural world, concordance between one's thoughts and actions, and most importantly an

attitude of truthfulness that is the result of cultivating purity of heart.

Sectarian Shinto includes a number of Shinto groups that have developed into cohesive religious movements. Primarily comprised of thirteen sects officially recognized by the government during the Meiji era (1868-1911), Sectarian Shinto groups generally have a historical founder and tend to emphasize group solidarity. In addition, their religious centers are often churches rather than shrines.

Folk Shinto is a general term applied to the practices and beliefs of the mass of Japanese people who visit shrines and engage in activities relating to the kami but who do not feel a strong affiliation with any particular sect. Such practices emphasize reverence for natural forces, purification, and the idea that by performing certain actions one may gain access to the power of the kami in order to influence particular aspects of one's life.

Although many Japanese believe that Shinto is an enduring tradition of indigenous religious practices, contemporary Shinto practice is in fact an amalgamation of numerous influences, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese philosophy. The focus of Shinto practice is the natural world, and Shinto

emphasizes the connection of individuals with their environment. In modern times the development of Shinto has been strongly influenced by revivalist movements that seek to link it with Japan's past. One particularly important movement has been the school of Revival Shinto (*Fukko Shinto*), which was linked to the National Learning (*Kokugaku*) movement of the early Edo period (late seventeenth century). This movement was an attempt to purge Shinto of the influence of Buddhism and other foreign traditions and return to a "pure" and "original" form of Shinto. The most important exponent of Revival Shinto was Motoori Norinaga, whose study of Japanese classics such as the *Tale of Genji* convinced him that there is a discernible Japanese character, which is based on awareness of, and reverence for, the natural environment. Norinaga stressed the polytheistic character of Shinto and contended that mundane affairs are shaped by the will of the kami.

During the Meiji period the nationalistic tendencies of Revival Shinto were highlighted and Shinto became the official state cult. The government stressed the divine origin of Japan and pointed out that no foreign invasion of the nation had ever succeeded. This was attributed to the actions of the kami, who protected Japan

and worked to ensure its well-being. The government also emphasized the traditional connection between the emperor and Amaterasu Omikami, which was believed to confer on the emperor a divine right to rule.

Because these nationalistic notions were a part of the militaristic policies of Japan prior to and during World War II, State Shinto was outlawed during the Allied occupation, and the emperor publicly repudiated his divine status. With the removal of government patronage, Shinto again became the popular religion of the Japanese people, a position that it holds today. Throughout the Japanese archipelago, people worship at the numerous Shinto shrines, participate in Shinto festivals, purchase amulets empowered by kami and believed to bring success, protection, or good health, and pay reverence to their clan deities and the spirits of their ancestors. Shinto remains a diffuse tradition that incorporates elements of other systems but that is distinctively Japanese.

SHINTO SCRIPTURES.

Shinto is a practice-oriented tradition that focuses on rituals, prayers, and attitudes associated with worship and veneration of the kami, and it has no distinct canon and few traditional texts. The earliest literary use of the term Shinto is found in the *Nihonshoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*, written in 720), which purports to be a record of the early history of Japan and which is an important source of information on ancient Japanese religious ideas and practices. The *Nihonshoki* (also referred to as the *Nihongi*) and the *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*) are among the oldest sources available for pre-Buddhist Japanese religious practices and myths, and these two works are the oldest known sacred literature of Shinto.

According to the accounts of these texts, before the arrival of humans on the Japanese islands, two kami named Izanami and Izanagi stood on the "floating bridge of heaven" and stirred the primordial waters with a jeweled spear. When the water began to coagulate they gathered up the sediment and let drops fall to form the islands of Japan.

Izanami died after giving birth to Kagutsuchi, the fire god, and Izanami followed her to the

netherworld hoping to ask her to return to the land of the living. She replied that she had already eaten the food of the dead and so could not return without special permission. She then instructed him not to follow her when she made the request, but after waiting for a long time he became impatient and went after her. When he found her, however, her flesh was putrefying and decomposed, which revolted him, and so he fled the netherworld, returned to the land of the living, and bathed in order to purify himself. When he washed his eyes, the dripping water gave rise to Amaterasu, the sun goddess, and her brother, Tsukiyomi the moon god.

Both the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* indicate that Amaterasu is the divine ancestor of the emperor, an idea that served an important role in the legitimation of the royal line. In addition, their descriptions of Japan as a special place created and guarded by the kami have been influential in shaping Japanese ideas about themselves and their country. The legends of these two works link the origin of the Japanese people with the kami and indicate that both humans and kami are intimately interrelated. Humans need the power of kami in order to achieve their goals, and the kami for their part require reverence and offerings from humans.

Other important Shinto texts include the *Fudoki* (*Records of Wind and Earth*), written in the eighth century, which is a collection of myths and legends; the *Man'yoshu* (*Collection of Ten Thousand Poems*), compiled in the late eighth century, which contains poems expressing the beliefs and practices of the common people; and the *Sendai Kujihongi* (*Narrative of Ancient Matters*), compiled in the ninth century, which contains accounts of the practices of the Mononobe clan.

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ZOROASTRIANISM

With little more than 100,000 followers, Zoroastrianism today is a shadow of its former self when a dominant religion of the Near East. Zoroastrianism developed in Iran and southern Russia around 1200 BCE, and at its height was the state religion of Persia's Empires from the third century CE until the expansion of Islam in the seventh century. Although the face of Zoroastrianism changed over its long history, several doctrines have remained consistent: (1) Ahura Mazda is worshipped as the one supreme God; (2) Zarathushtra is said to be Ahura Mazda's prophet who delivers his unique revelation; (3) the universe is a battle ground between opposing good and evil forces, and this cosmological dualism accounts for the presence of good and evil everywhere. Angra Mainyu, the primary evil spirit which embodies evil, is to be opposed; (4) Ahura Mazda created several divine beings, or Beneficent Immortals, who are to be venerated; (5) humans will be judged in the afterlife for their good or evil deeds.

BACKGROUND AND LIFE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Between 2000 and 1500 BCE, there occurred a mass migration of Aryan people, perhaps from eastern Europe, to the region of what is now Iran. Over the next few centuries they successfully assimilated with the native people, as indicated by the name "Iran" which means home or land of the Aryans. The Aryan newcomers brought with them the an ancient polytheistic religion which involved the worship of daevas, or divine beings. After some centuries, a group of these Aryans migrated further to northern India, forming the basis of the early Hindu religion. Aryan culture had three principal social classes (priests, warriors, and cattle breeders), and different deities were associated with each. The gods of the priestly class included Mitra, Anahita, Varuna (the latter perhaps identified as Ahura Mazda). The priestly class also had religious rituals involving sacrificing oxen, imbibing the intoxicating juice of the haoma plant (*soma* in Sanskrit), and fire rituals, perhaps derived from Agni, the fire God of early India's religion.

Zarathushtra emerged as a religious reformer, reacting against both the polytheism and rituals of the Aryan religion. Little historical

information is available about the life of Zarathushtra, and scholars have variously placed him between 1,500 and 500 BCE. The most plausible tradition places him around 1200 BCE in the Azerbaijan province of Northwest Iran; some linguistic and archaeological evidence, however, suggest that he was from an oasis tribal setting in Eastern Iran, near what is now the Afghanistan border.

According to later Zoroastrian tradition, Zarathushtra began his mission at age 30, after having a series of visions in which he was escorted to Ahura Mazda's presence, where he received his divine message. The first ten years of his mission were especially unsuccessful, and his only convert was his cousin. His teaching antagonized a group of priests who conspired against him and threw him into prison. At age 42, still in prison, his fortune changed with the conversion of King Vishtaspa (Hystaspes in Greek), an as yet unidentified monarch. Vishtaspa had an ill horse, and Zarathushtra healed it, leg by leg. During the process, the king was required to make certain concessions. The king was impressed, and the whole court accepted Zarathushtra's teachings.

Although Zarathushtra's life events remain hazy, there is greater knowledge about the content of his teachings and his role as a religious reformer.

His foremost reform is advocating the supremacy of Ahura Mazda. The name *Ahura Mazda* means "Wise Lord," and Zarathushtra described him as holy, eternal, just, all knowing, and creator of all. Ahura Mazda is also said to be the source of all goodness, including success, glory, honor, physical health, and immortality. Zarathushtra condemned the *daevas* of the Indo-Iranian pantheon as subordinate devils, and their priests as devil followers. He also attacked many of the traditional Indo-Iranian religious rituals, especially the wasteful slaughter of great numbers of oxen, bulls and cows in ritual sacrifices. Aspects of the haoma ritual were condemned, but Zarathushtra continued this tradition with some modifications. The traditional fire rituals were also modified so as to reflect worship of Ahura Mazda, who is symbolized by undying fire.

Zarathushtra emphasized the religious conflict between good and evil. This ethical emphasis is best described as dualistic insofar as all key players -- human and divine -- choose either good or evil. Ahura Mazda demands ethical and ritual purity and judges the souls of people after death. The principal evil force, called the Lie (*druj*), wages war against Ahura Mazda. To assist in the war against evil, Ahura Mazda created Beneficent Immortals (*Amesha Spentas*).

Later Zoroastrian tradition sees them as guardians over areas of Creation. They are: Asha Vahishta (Best Order, or Best Truth), associated with fire; Vohu Manah (Good Thought), associated with the ox; Khshathra Vairya (Desirable Dominion), associated with metals; Spenta Armaiti (Beneficent Devotion), associated with the earth; Haurvatat (Wholeness), associated with water; and Ameretat (Immortality), associated with plants. The theological status of the Beneficent Immortals is not entirely clear, and it is not certain whether they are distinct entities or merely different aspects of Ahura Mazda. Some scholars believe that their names and functions are derived from traditional Indo-Iranian deities, particularly the deities of the lower classes.

According to Zarathushtra, the cosmic ethical drama began when two twin spirits chose between good and evil. The spirit Spenta Mainyu (Beneficent Spirit) allied himself with good, and Angra Mainyu (Destructive Spirit) chose evil. As Zoroastrianism developed over the centuries, Angra Mainyu became the embodiment of all evil, and even the co-rival of Ahura Mazda. Although his role is more limited in Zarathushtra's teachings, Zoroastrian tradition consistently describes Angra Mainyu

as working for evil in the service of the Lie and is the source of misfortune, disaster, war, sickness, and death. To aid him in the assault on good, Angra Mainyu created several devils (*daevas*) which correspond with the Beneficent Immortals. The demon opposing Vohu Mano is Ako Mano (Bad Mind), against Asha Vahishta is Spozgar (Disorder), against Khshathra Vairya is Bushyasp (Sloth), against Spenta Armaiti is Asto Vidhatu (Death, literally, Bone Dissolver), against Haurvatat is Az (Greed), and against Ameretat is Tishn (Thirst). Angra Mainyu also counter-created demons/fiends which correspond to the other spiritual beings (*Yazads*).

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF ZOROASTRIANISM.

Zarathushtra's new religion continued to spread after his death. During the Achaemenian Persian dynasty (550-330 BCE), the first documented period of Zoroastrian influence, the religion was associated with the Magi. Although the identity and role of the Magi is unclear, they were experts in cultic ritual and claimed to be descendants of Zarathushtra's first converts. They may have originally been an early hereditary class of priests who allied themselves with Zarathushtra's teachings. When Mesopotamia was conquered by Alexander the Great, the impact of Greek culture caused a decline of Zoroastrianism. It was revived during the Parthian period (247 BCE-237 CE), although there is little reliable information to indicate its character at this time.

Zoroastrianism peaked in influence during the Sasanian period (227-651 CE) when it became the state religion of Persia. Zoroastrian expansion throughout the empire was mostly the result of conversion, though at times adherents to rival forms of worship were punished. Sasanid theologians developed Zoroastrianism's great cosmological myths, dividing cosmic history into four 3,000-year periods. During the final period, Zarathushtra and his three

descendent prophets appeared at 1,000 year intervals to wage war on Angra Mainyu. The world currently awaits the last prophet, Saoshyant, who will bring about final judgment and usher in a new world. The dead will then be resurrected, Ahura Mazda will judge all people according to their conduct as recorded in the book of deeds, and Angra Mainyu will be destroyed. Hell will also be dismantled, and the wicked (with few exceptions), having been purified, will be released.

Zoroastrianism gradually declined after 633 when the Muslims entered Persia and most of the population was forced to convert to Islam. Zoroastrianism was still tolerated for about 300 more years, but persecution in the 10th century prompted many to leave Iran for India. Known as the Parsis, the immigrating Zoroastrians settled near Bombay and today total around 70,000. They are generally financially well off, and many help to support the remaining Zoroastrians in Iran, who today number around 30,000. An additional 20,000 Zoroastrians live in other parts of the world.

TEACHINGS FROM THE AVESTA.

The foundational and oldest Zoroastrian scripture is the *Avesta*, a compilation of liturgical texts composed over a 1,000 year period. The original *Avesta* probably comprised twenty-two books and included historical, medical, and legal information along with liturgical texts. Only a small part of the original *Avesta* has survived. Zoroastrian legend recounts that two official copies were destroyed by Alexander during his campaign in the Persian capital. Priests gathered the remaining orally transmitted fragments, which were regularly recited in liturgies. The *Avesta* was kept alive through recitation until about 400 CE, when an official edition was ordered by the Sasanid rulers. It is written in an archaic language called Avestan, which is related to Sanskrit and uses a modified Pahlavi alphabet. The *Avesta* is the only surviving example of a text in this language.

In its current form, the *Avesta* is about 1,000 pages and written in different dialects from different periods of time. The most important division is the *Yasna*, a collection of prayers and liturgical formulas in seventy-two chapters. A fifty-page section in the middle of the *Yasna*, called the *Gathas* (chapters 28-34, 43-54), contains hymns in an older dialect, and is

believed to have been written by Zarathushtra himself. The other key divisions of the *Avesta* are:

Visparat (all the leaders): liturgical extension of the Yasna (22 chapters);

Vendidad (law against demons): instructions for ritual purification and moral practice to ward off evil powers, also containing myths and medical texts (22 chapters);

Khorde Avesta (Smaller Avesta): book of daily prayer used by the laity. Among other texts, it includes:

- *Yashts* (songs of praise): long hymns to various divine beings, some paralleling those found in the Hindu Vedas, plus epic narratives about kings and heroes;
- *Niyayeshs*: litanies to the Sun, Mithra, the Moon, the Waters, and to Fire;
- *Gahs*: dedications for each period of the day;
- *Afrinagans*: blessings;

The *Avesta* also includes several shorter fragments of lost books. Most of the surviving texts of the Avesta were used ceremonially. One of the oldest and most central Zoroastrian statements of faith is a creed from Yasna

Chapter 12, which was perhaps initially required of converts. In both thought and deed, the believer vows to reject all evil as associated with daevas and the Lie [druj], and instead adhere to the good of Ahura Mazda, and the Beneficent Immortals [Amesha Spentas]. The opening of the creed is as follows:

I curse the Daevas. I declare myself a Mazda-worshipper, a supporter of Zarathushtra, hostile to the Daevas, fond of Ahura's teaching, a praiser of the Amesha Spentas, a worshipper of the Amesha Spentas. I ascribe all good to Ahura Mazda, 'and all the best,' the Asha-owning one, splendid, xwarena-owning, whose is the cow, whose is Asha, whose is the light, 'may whose blissful areas be filled with light'.

The dualistic battle between good and evil forces is the most characteristic feature of Zoroastrianism during all phases of its history. The following is from a section of the Yasna known as the Gathas -- texts believed to have been written by Zarathushtra.

Now the two primal Spirits, who revealed themselves in vision as Twins, are the Better and the Bad in thought and word and action. Between these two the wise once chose

aright, the foolish not so. When these two Spirits came together in the beginning, they established Life and Not-Life, and that at the last the Worst Existence [i.e. hell] shall be to the followers of the Lie [druj], but the Best Thought [i.e. heaven] to him that follows Truth [asha]. Of these two Spirits he that followed the Lie chose doing the worst things. The most beneficent Spirit chose Truth [asha], he that clothes him with heavy diamonds as a garment. [Yasna Ch. 30]

In this Gatha, Zarathushtra describes the foundational moral conflict between Ahura Mazda and the Lie (druj). The conflict is carried on further by Ahura Mazda's twin sons, identified in other passages as the good Spenta Mainyu (Beneficent Spirit) and the evil Angra Mainyu (Destructive Spirit). This passage presents significant interpretive problems. On one interpretation, Spenta Mainyu is regarded as separate from Ahura Mazda; thus, both of these battling spirits -- including Angra Mainyu -- were created by Ahura Mazda. A second interpretation, by William Malandra, is that the twin sons are merely ethical concepts, not spiritual beings. Thus, Zarathushtra is retelling a traditional myth which was familiar to his audience, and then reinterpreting it in the light of his own revelations. "Spenta Mainyu" then, is

as a synonym for Ahura Mazda. On either interpretation, the cosmic dualism established between Spenta Mainyu vs. Angra Mainyu is paralleled by an ethical dualism between Druj (the lie, evil), and Asha (truth, righteousness). Yet another interpretation of the above passage became the basis of the Zurvan sect of Zoroastrianism which flourished between the fifth and tenth centuries CE. Zurvan, a minor deity mentioned in the Avesta, is the supreme God of the sect. As seen above, Yasna 30 states that " Now the two primal Spirits, who revealed themselves in vision as Twins, are the Better and the Bad in thought and word and action." The Zurvan sect interprets this literally and sees Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu twin sons of Zurvan. The good and evil twins create the world and wage war on each other, and the evil twin is ultimately defeated.

The moral battle between good and evil not only touches the spiritual realm of thoughts and deeds, but the material realm as well. Things associated with contamination and death, for example, are deemed evil. Although no longer widely practiced today, Zoroastrian rituals concerning the removal of hair and nails vividly illustrate how physical things can be tainted by evil. The problem of physical things being contaminated by evil is most pronounced with

dead human bodies. When one dies, a Corpse Demon (druj nasu) comes into the body and contaminates it and items which touch the body. Burial is not possible, since this contaminates the sacred earth, and cremation contaminates the fire. The preferred method of corpse disposal is for dead bodies to be devoured by corpse-eating dogs and birds which frighten off the Corpse Demon. To facilitate this, Zoroastrians construct Towers of Silence (dakhmas), cylindrical walled structures that expose corpses to vultures. This practice has been frequently noted in literature and is one of the most distinctive aspects of Zoroastrian ritual.

TEACHINGS FROM LATER WRITINGS.

In addition to the *Avesta*, Zoroastrians have numerous scriptures from the Sasanian period which are written in a middle-Persian dialect called Pahlavi. Thus, the writings are typically called *Pahlavi texts*. Many are exegetical commentaries (called *Zand*) which translate, summarize, and explain the *Avesta*. The Pahlavi texts are more numerous than those of the *Avesta*. The primary ones are:

Bundahishn (Original Creation): 36 chapters on cosmogony, mythology, and cosmic history;

Denkard (Acts of the Religion): a collection of doctrines, customs, traditions, history, and literature, originally written in nine books, of which the first two are now lost;

Datastan-i Denik: religious opinions of the high priest Manushkihar in response to ninety-two questions;

Zadsparam:: a collection by the high priest Zadsparam, younger brother of Manushkihar, which discusses cosmology and the life of Zarathushtra.

In addition to the Pahlavi texts, several later Zoroastrian texts are written in a more modern Persian language. The most important of these is the *Sad Dar*(*One Hundred Doors*), the first Zoroastrian text known to the West, which was translated into Latin by Thomas Hyde in 1700.

Zarathushtra taught that heaven awaits good people, and hell evil people. Entrance into heaven requires crossing the Chinvat Bridge which spans the abyss of hell below (Yasna 46:10, 11; 51:13). The details of this journey of the soul were worked out in later Pahlavi texts, such as the following by ninth century Zoroastrian high priest Manushkihar from his *Datastan-i Denik*. On the fourth day after death, our souls leave our bodies and we cross the Chinvat Bridge. If we sided with good during our lives, then the bridge is as wide as seven spears and we easily pass to heaven, which is filled with beauty, light, pleasant scents, and happiness. If we sided with evil during our lives, however, the bridge turns sideways becomes as narrow as a razor's edge, and we plummet into hell which is filled with stench, filth, and pain.

Those who are wicked, as they place their feet onto the bridge, because of distress and its sharpness, fall from the middle of the bridge, and roll over headmost. The unpleasantness of this path to hell is like the

worldly one in the midst of the stinking and dying things. There numbers of the sharp-pointed darts are planted out inverted and point upwards, and they come unwillingly running. These do not allow him to stay behind or delay. This pleasantness and unpleasantness to the souls is much greater than their worldly likeness, since that which is fit for the spirit is greater than that fit for the world. [Datastani Denik, Ch. 20, 21, 26, 27]

In later Pahlavi Zoroastrian writings, Angra Mainyu has a more elevated role in cosmic history. In the Bundahishn, a Pahlavi text on cosmogony and cosmic history, we find a description of the initial confrontation between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu and their ensuing 12,000 year battle. During the first 3,000 Ahura Mazda created the Beneficent Immortals and the world. Angra Mainyu responded by creating helper demons. They then agreed to limit the struggle to an additional 9,000 years.

During the second 3,000 year period of cosmic history, Angra Mainyu stays in darkness only to wage a full scale assault on creation during the third 3,000 year period. The fourth and final

3,000 year period begins with the birth of Zarathushtra, who rallies humans to the cause of Ahura Mazda. The following describes the miraculous conception of Zarathushtra, attempts to kill him at an early age, his encounter with Vohu Manah and his call to prophethood at age 30. The selections are from the Pahlavi Denkard, a Pahlavi compendium of Zoroastrian doctrine, and the Zatspram, a collection of doctrines from ninth century CE. Zoroastrian high priest Zatspram. After Zarathushtra, three additional saviors are to come at 1,000 year intervals. They will be born from virgins who bathe in a lake guarded by 99,999 angels who preserve Zarathushtra's seed. The saviors are Hushedar, Aushedar-Mah, and Saoshyant. Saoshyant's coming marks the end of the 12,000 year cosmic struggle between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu. The following, from the Pahlavi Denkard, describes the birth of Saoshyant and his defeat of Angra Mainyu in the final battle. After the defeat of Angra Mainyu in the final battle, the dead will resurrect on the spot where they died, and Ahura Mazda will judge everyone. The evil of the world will be purged with molten metal, Angra Mainyu will be destroyed, and a new universe will come into being:

Afterwards, Ahura Mazda seizes on the evil spirits.... and the dragon Go-chihr will be burnt in the melted metal, and the stench and pollution which were in hell are burned in that metal, and hell becomes quite pure. Ahura Mazda sets the hiding place into which the evil spirit fled, in that metal. He brings the land of hell back for the enlargement of the world. The renovation arises in the universe by his will, and the world is immortal forever and everlasting. This earth becomes an iceless, slopeless plain. Even the mountain, whose summit is the support of the Chinvat bridge, they keep down, and it will not exist. [Bundahishn Ch. 30]

Parallels between Zoroastrian beliefs and those of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are striking, for example the messianic figure of Saoshyant, the Armageddon-like final battle, bodily resurrection, final judgment, and heaven and hell. Many historians of religion believe that Zoroastrianism is the source of these beliefs. However, the complex web of Zoroastrian doctrines themselves developed over time, and precisely when certain doctrines first appeared is still unclear. Until this is more firmly established, it is best to simply note the parallels.

RITUALS.

Zoroastrians have a variety of rituals, such as seven holy days of obligation, rites of passage, including the navjote initiation ceremony for young adolescents, and rituals of cleansing and purification. Six primary ritual obligations are discussed in the Sad Dar (Hundred Doors), a text on a hundred subjects which is written in Persian. They are, (1) celebration of the season festivals, (2) keeping the days of the guardian spirits on the last ten days of the religious year, (3) attending to the souls of deceased relatives, (4) reciting the Sun Litany three times every day (5) reciting the Moon Litany three times every month, and (6) celebrating the Rapithwin ceremony once every year. In addition to ritual obligations, Zoroastrians have strict codes of moral obligation which encourage virtues and condemn vices. Often these moral instructions are in the form of aphorisms (Andarz), such as the following from the Denkard:

There are five best things in religion, which are truthfulness, generosity, being possessed of virtue, diligence and advocacy. ... The best generosity is when we give something to a person with no hope of receiving anything in reward in this world, and we do not even

expect the receiver to show us gratitude and praise.

* * * *

JUDAISM

Judaism, with its 3,000 year existence, is one of the world's oldest living religions. Like all religions, Judaism has evolved over time, but several key beliefs pervade its rich history. First and foremost is the belief that YHWH (usually pronounced Yahweh) is the only God and creator of all. Second, humans should obey God's law as found in both written and oral law. Third, God made a series of covenants with the Jews to designate their lineage as chosen. The most significant of these covenants are with Abraham, who received the promise of a nation, with Moses, who received the Law, and with David, who received the kingdom. Fourth is the belief that a coming King-Messiah will free the Jews from foreign domination. Unlike the other major monotheistic religions in the Western tradition -- Christianity and Islam -- Judaism is distinguished by being *this-worldly*. Although a doctrine of the afterlife can be found in its teachings, greater emphasis is placed on the nation, the land, and traditions.

BEGINNINGS.

Judaism is inseparably tied to the history of the Jewish people; their scriptures, feasts, and worship practices recall events of the past. The earliest historical and archaeological record derived from the period of Israel's settlement in its land is from the 12th century BCE, during the period of the Judges. At this time the Israelites were occupied with capturing territory from the previous inhabitants of perhaps a thousand years, the Canaanites, and settling into agrarian life. The land, *Israel* to the Jews, and *Canaan* to the Canaanites, is an area about the size of New Jersey, located on the southeast shore of the Mediterranean sea. Some of the Israelite stories defined their identity as a nation and entitled them to the land.

Two initial creation stories describe how we all got here. Central to both is the idea that humans are the pinnacle of God's creative activity. The first creation story emphasizes the cosmic structure of creation (Genesis Ch. 1, 2:1-3):

When God began to create heaven and earth -- the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the

water -- God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

Also, the writer sees creation involving three mandates. First, humans are to fill the earth and master it. Second, humans are to eat plants for food. Finally, the seventh day of the week is declared holy. The other creation story is sometimes seen as more agrarian-oriented (Genesis Ch. 2:4 ff.):

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens-- and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground-- the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the

breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Both creation accounts describe how God created two original humans, Adam and Eve, the parents of all humanity. However, the story continues, they disobeyed God and introduced evil into the world. After several generations, evil and ungodliness propagated to the point that God finds all the earth's inhabitants wicked, except for Noah, and destroys the earth in a flood. This story sets the stage for the first great covenant in Judaism: that between God and Noah. When the waters subside, God promises that he will not again destroy the world by water and permits humans to eat animal flesh. However, all slaughter of animals must be done in the context of a sacrificial rite conducted by a priest.

After Noah, the story line then jumps forward to Abraham, a Mesopotamian nomad from a few hundred years prior to the Hebrew settlement in Canaan. God selects Abraham to be father of a nation and instructs Abraham and his clan to migrate to Canaan, which God then gives to him. This is the second great covenant of Judaism, and circumcision is the sign of that covenant. Two generations later famine drove his

descendants to Egypt and, within a few more generations, their population dramatically increased. For a while all was fine, until the Pharaoh of Egypt, Intimidated by their numbers, enslaved Abraham's descendants, using them as forced labor for his building projects. Soon he issued an edict that male infants were to be drowned. To save her child, one woman placed her toddler, Moses, in a basket and floated it down the Nile, where it was discovered and he was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter. When Moses grew up, God appeared to him and instructed him to lead his people out of Egypt and into Canaan. To break the Pharaoh's resistance in releasing the Israelites, God killed the first born humans and cattle in Egypt. In preparation for the event, the Israelites are instructed to perform a series of activities which became the basis of the Passover, one of Judaism's most sacred feast, is in celebration of this event. Eventually, they were led by Moses out of Egypt and into the desert, where they wandered for 40 years.

During the journey, Moses received detailed codes of law directly from God. at Mount Sinai, a means by which the Israelites could become a holy people. This is the third great covenant in Judaism. The Mosaic Law, as it is called, contains a series of codes on social, ethical, and

religious topics, and is articulated throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, interspersed with narratives about the Israelites' 40 years of wandering. The various codes include the Covenant Code (Exodus 21-23), the Purity Code (Leviticus 11-16), the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-27), and the Law Code (Deuteronomy 12-26). The best known part of the Mosaic law, though, is the 10 Commandments, which are actually presented twice. The following is the version from Exodus 20:

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall

labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

The literary and legal style of these codes is frequently compared to other codes of the ancient near east, such as the Code of Hammurabi, king of Ur. For example, on the issue of kidnapping, the Hammurabi code states, "If a man has stolen the young son of a freeman, he shall be put to death." By comparison, the

Covenant Code in Exodus 21:16 states, "He who kidnaps a man -- whether he has sold him or is still holding him -- shall be put to death." The following is from the Holiness Code, a P text in the Book of Leviticus.

The story continues that, after 40 years of wandering, the Israelites capture Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' successor. Politically, Canaan was a decentralized collection of tiny independent kingdoms. Religiously, they performed plant and animal sacrificial rites in temples and open air places, and fertility rites of prostitution. Key deities of the Canaanites were El the creator, Asherah the consort of El, Baal the son of El and god of storm, and Anat daughter of El and goddess of war. The Israelites and Canaanites already shared a common ethnic and language family, which was Semitic. As they occupied the land and eventually controlled the region, many intermarried with the locals and adopted the Canaanite ways, including worship of their deities. Politically the Israelites were a loose confederation of 12 tribes. A political balance of power was held in Israel between the chosen tribal leaders, legal and military judges, prophets, and priests from a thirteenth and landless group or tribe, Levi. Geographically there was a more delicate balance of power

between two southern tribes, Judah (the largest of the twelve) and Benjamin, and the remaining ten tribes located primarily in the north, who felt threatened by Judah's size and political dominance.

One of the few women leaders in Jewish history was a military Judge named Deborah; here story is described in the book of Judges. With the aid of the military leader Barak, Deborah and a small group defeat the army of Jabin, King of Canaan. The Canaanite army, headed by Sisera, had an initial advantage of 900 chariots. Due to a sudden divinely caused cloud burst and flash flood, the Israelites gain the advantage. The narrative continues with the Song of Deborah, which commemorates this victory. Composed about 1100 BCE, it is one of the oldest passages of the Tanakh and is similar in structure to Canaanite poems of the period. Historically it denotes the Israelites' successful habitation of the hillsides, overshadowing Canaanite occupation of the valley regions:

In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,

In the days of Jael, caravans ceased,

And wayfarers went

By Roundabout paths.

**Deliverance ceased,
Ceased in Israel,
Till you arose, O Deborah,
Arose, O mother, in Israel!
When they chose new gods,
Was there a fighter then in the gates?
No shield or spear was seen
Among forty thousand in Israel!**

UNITED AND DIVIDED KINGDOMS.

An unexpected influx of warring invaders from the northeast Mediterranean area forced the Israelites to unify politically. These invading Philistines had a special military advantage in iron weaponry. Bronze weapons were less effective, especially in the hands of an Israelite army of drafted civilians. The need for a monarchy arose to facilitate a more concerted effort to block the Philistine power. Saul was appointed the first king and narratives relate how his disobedience quickly put him in disfavor with God. Saul died in battle with the Philistines after the Kingdom and military leadership passed to his son-in-law, David, who instituted a standing professional army. Equipped with iron weapons, David's army effectively put an end to the Philistine threat. Through military and diplomatic maneuvers, the Kingdom of Israel took control of territory as far south as Egypt, and as far north as Mesopotamia. The contrast between Saul's and David's reigns reflects the most consistent theological theme in the historical narratives of the Israelites: obedience to God results in prosperity, disobedience results in hardship. The fourth and final great covenant in the Judaism is with King David, wherein a promise

is given that David's house and kingship will be secure and his throne established forever:

The Lord declares to you that He, the Lord, will establish a house for you. When your days are done and you lie with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own issue, and I will establish his kingship. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to Me. When he does wrong, I will chastise him with the rod of men and the affliction of mortals; but I will never withdraw My favor from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed to make room for you. Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure before you; your throne shall be established forever. [2 Samuel 7:8-16]

At David's death, the throne passed to his young son, Solomon. Legendary for his wisdom, Solomon is said to have been the wisest of all men and author of three thousand proverbs. He is also renown for his multiple diplomatic marriages, and it is his reign that Israel's glory

peaked. Its borders extended further than they ever would again (though not as far as under David), and Israel was a key player in ancient near eastern politics. Solomon launched monumental building projects including several fortified cities and a palace. But the jewel in the crown of Solomon's achievements was the construction of Israel's first permanent temple, said to have taken 13 years to complete. All sacrifices were to be performed only at the temple in Jerusalem; thus the temple became the focus of all religious activity in Israel. Although Solomon taxed the entire country to fund his projects, benefits were seen primarily in Judah, which further alienated the northern tribes.

Solomon died about 922 BCE, and the throne passed to his son, Rehoboam. When Rehoboam announced that he would continue his father's policy of taxation, the northern tribes split from the south and proclaimed their own kingdom. The religious explanation given for this split is Solomon's continual worship of regional deities. The southern kingdom was thereafter referred to as *Judah*, while the northern kingdom retained the name *Israel*. During this period, both the northern and southern kingdoms continued to be influenced by Canaanite religious practices and efforts were made at

monotheistic reform in both kingdoms by prophets and kings. Writers of the Tanakh condemn these worship practices and praise the Yahwist prophets and kings who challenge them. Israelite worship of the goddess Asherah is of particular interest. In Canaanite mythology, Asherah was the wife of the Canaanite high god, El, and in some popular Israelite religious practices may have been a consort of Yahweh. Worship rituals of Asherah center on sacred pillars, which in the are strictly forbidden (Deuternonomy 16:21-22). The Tanakh presents a dramatic showdown between the prophets of Asherah and Baal on the one hand, and the prophet Elijah on the other hand. Elijah is the lone defender of Yahweh in the northern Kingdom at this time. To demonstrate that Yahweh is the only true God, Elijah proposes a contest in which both sides set up their own respective altars, and call on their respective Deity to ignite their altar. Elijah wins the contest, and has the rival prophets slaughtered (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1-2, 17-40). Elijah's monotheistic victory was short lived and the northern Kingdom (as well as the southern) gravitated toward Canaanite religion.

After a 200-year existence, the northern kingdom was conquered by the Mesopotamian superpower of the time, Assyria. For several

decades, the north had tried several strategies of resistance, but in 722 BCE its kingdom was annexed as an Assyrian province. Some Israelites were deported, while others fled to Judah. Colonists from Mesopotamia settled in the region and intermarried with the remaining inhabitants, forming the Samaritans, a remnant of which remains today. The southern Kingdom of Judah survived Assyrian encroachment and continued for another one hundred and fifty years. However, it was continually embroiled in foreign political conflicts. Under the leadership of King Ahaz, the southern Kingdom initially escaped Assyrian annexation by becoming an Assyrian vassal. Two decades later, though, Judah's King Hezekiah broke with the Assyrians, prompting a military confrontation which ended in loss of territory for Judah and a return to vassal status. The prophet Isaiah was an advisor to both Ahaz and Hezekiah. His advice to both kings was the same: do not participate in anti-Assyrian conspiracies, but trust in God for deliverance. He charged that the people of Judah had forsaken God and risk being purged. Although Hezekiah and later King Josiah made valiant efforts at monotheistic reform, each time the populous reverted to Canaanite practices.

EXILE AND RESTORATION.

In Mesopotamia, the power structure shifted and around 610 BCE a group of Semites in Babylon, the Chaldeans, overthrew the Assyrians and formed a new Babylonian Empire. The Babylonians invaded surrounding countries to bring them within its control. In 596 they marched into Judah, looted the temple and royal treasury, and exiled the royal family and upper class Israelites to Babylon. The Babylonians appointed Zedekiah as a puppet king and at first Zedekiah paid tribute to the Empire. However, he too rebelled mistakenly thinking that Egypt would come to his defense if necessary. In retaliation, the Babylonian army invaded on two more occasions (587, and 583 BCE). Judah was crushed. Cities and homes were destroyed, thousands of skilled craftsmen and potential trouble makers were deported to Babylon, and thousands more fled to Egypt, some of whom came to the Island of Elephantine. Most significantly, Solomon's temple was destroyed. Although events during the Babylonian captivity are sketchy, the trauma of the exile apparently forced the Israelites to re-examine and solidify their religious beliefs. In the absence of the temple, the *Torah*, or books of Moses, became more important. Their understanding of Yahweh may also have

changed to view him as sovereign authority over the universe. The term *Jew* became common at this time, which means someone from Judah. Captive in Babylon, the psalmist in the following passage reflects nostalgically on the beauty of Zion, referring to the city of Jerusalem, possibly the Temple Mount.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion.

There on the Poplars we hung up our lyres, for our captors asked us there for songs,

our tormentors, for amusement, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

How can we sing a song of the Lord on alien soil?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate

if I cease to think of you, if I don not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.

Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall; how they cried, "Strip her, strip her to her very foundations!"

Fair Babylon, you predator, a blessing on him who repays you in kind what you have inflicted on us; a blessing on

him who seizes your babies and dashes them against the rocks! [Psalms 137]

Yet again the power structure in Mesopotamia shifted. In 539 BCE, the Persian emperor Cyrus overthrew the Babylonians, and reversed the policy of exiling foreign captives as practiced by the Babylonians and, earlier, by the Assyrians. With his encouragement, 40,000 exiled Jews returned to their homeland, Judah, now known by its Greek pronunciation *Judea*. Cyrus also encouraged the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple and returned to the Jews the temple treasures which had been taken by the Babylonians. Judea, however, remained a province of the Persian Empire. The Jews who stayed in Babylon continued to prosper and populate, and their views may have been influenced by Zoroastrianism, the Persian religion at the time. Angeology and demonology become more prominent themes in post-exilic writings. Greater emphasis was placed on the resurrection of the dead, cataclysms of the end times, and the age of a redeemer or Messiah. The Book of Esther describes a dramatic episode in the lives of Jews who remained in Babylon at this time. Esther is queen to Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), one of Cyrus's successors, reigning from 486-465 BCE.

Unknown to the King, Esther is a Jew. When her cousin Mordecai refuses to bow to the King for religious reasons, Haman, a member of the court, is incensed and plots to have Mordicai, along with the rest of the Jews in the region, executed. The King sanctions Haman's plan. When Mordicai pleads with Ester to speak to the King on behalf of the Jews, she plans a banquet for the King during which she reveals Haman's plot at it. Haman is hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordicai. The Jews are granted the right to defend themselves against their anti-Jewish enemies. The story of Esther is the basis for the Jewish feast Purim.

In 458 BCE an additional 17,000 people returned to the land under the leadership of Ezra. Ezra was a Babylonian-born Jewish priest devoted to the Law of Moses. He petitioned Artaxerxes, the reigning King of the Persian Empire, to lead another migration of Jews back to their homeland. Artaxerxes agreed and empowered him to make political and religious reforms as Ezra saw fit. Ezra returned from Babylon with a complete *Torah* in the form we have today, which is the five books of Moses. On arrival, he was distressed to see that the returning Jews before him had intermarried, and he proclaimed that 114 priests and laymen should have their marriages annulled. Thirteen

years after Ezra's return, Nehemiah, a Jewish cupbearer to the Persian King, was granted permission by the King to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, still in ruins from the Babylonian invasion. A gifted administrator, Nehemiah completed the project in 52, days even in the face of opposition from neighboring provinces. Shortly after completion of the walls, the Jews celebrated a series of feasts, during which Ezra publicly read and interpreted the scrolls of Moses. The concluding events of the Tanakh focus on Ezra's and Nehemiah's activities, as described in the books which bear their names. They two leaders instituted a theocratic state with power vested in the priests and their reforms set a new direction for the Jewish religion. The Jews were required to take an oath to observe the Torah, tithe, sacrifice, and attend feasts. Marriage with foreigners was condemned in order to assure cultural and religious survival. He also established a council called *The Great Synagogue* to formulate doctrine and perhaps compile the texts of the *Tanakh*.

Two of the most beloved books of the *Tanakh* were also crystalized at this time: the books of Psalms and Proverbs. The Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 songs and prayers written over a 600 year period, many after the Babylonian exile. The book may have taken its

final form under the editorship of Ezra, and is sometimes referred to as the hymn book of the second temple. Although the authorship of most of the psalms is uncertain, 73 are ascribed in the text to David and are traditionally said to reflect happy or troubled periods of his life. The Psalms are classified as they relate to themes of deliverance, penitence, praise, pilgrimages, historical episodes, and messianic hope. Also compiled during the time of Ezra, The Book of Proverbs contains seven distinct collections of sayings, the first four of which are traditionally attributed to Solomon. The book contains sayings from throughout periods of the united and divided Kingdom, and are mostly in the form of two-line sentences about an aspect of human experience, usually secular. Three literary styles are exhibited in the proverbs. Synonymous parallelism occurs when the second line repeats the content of the first, such as, "A ready response is a joy to a man, And how good is a word rightly timed! (15:23)" Antithetic parallelism is where good behavior in the first line is contrasted with bad behavior in the second line, such as, "A wise son makes his father happy; A fool of a man humiliates his mother" (15:10). Finally, ascending parallelism is when the second line completes the train of thought in the first line, such as, "The eyes of

**the Lord are everywhere, Observing the bad
and the good" (15:3).**

COMPILATION OF THE TANAKH AND OTHER SACRED TEXTS.

As noted, the most sacred collection of writings for Judaism is the *Tanakh*. The word "Tanakh" is an acronym coined in the middle ages from the initials of its three divisions: the Torah (Law), the Neviim (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings). The 24 books of the *Tanakh* are traditionally categorized as follows:

**Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus,
Numbers, Deuteronomy**

Neviim:

**Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges,
Samuel, Kings**

**Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah,
Ezekiel, The Twelve (Hosea, Joel,
Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah,
Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,
Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)**

**Ketuvim: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth,
Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations,
Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles**

The books of the *Tanakh* were written and compiled over a period of 1,000 years, from

approximately 1100-100 BCE. Each book has a detailed history of authorship, editing, and re-editing. The writings appear in a variety of literary genres, including song lyrics, historical chronicles, wisdom literature, laws, prophecies, and apocalypses. The oldest stories and poems, such as the *Song of Deborah*, may have been orally transmitted before taking written form. Much of the *Tanakh* bears the mark of post-exilic Judaism, either in composition or in editing. The books and main divisions of the *Tanakh* were in place when in 90 CE a Sanhedrin council in the Palestinian city of Jabneh gave the list its official stamp.

Of all writings within Judaism, the five books of the Torah have always been considered the most sacred. Thus, an understanding of its development is important. The term *Torah* means law, in the sense of instruction or teaching, which traces its authority to Moses. More specifically, *Torah* has come to mean the collection of writings consisting of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Any account of the origin and authorship of the *Torah* must take place against the backdrop of a theory in biblical scholarship known as the Documentary Hypothesis, most famously articulated by Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). According to this,

the *Torah* is a fabric sewn from four distinct textual sources identified as J, E, P, and D. The J source acquired its name from its continued use of the word *Yahweh* (often mispronounced *Jehovah*) for God in early parts of the narrative (prior to the revelation of the divine name of God to Moses). The E source is so named for its pervasive use of the term *Elohim* for God. The D source refers to the bulk of the text of Deuteronomy with its unique style. Finally, The P source derives its name from the priestly content of its text.

Since Wellhausen, biblical scholars have identified more precisely the authors and dates of the four sources. One interpretation is that the J source was written by an author of the southern kingdom and reflects the political interests of Judah. Sometimes this involves besmirching the north. The E source, by contrast, was written by an author of the northern kingdom, possibly a Levitic priest, who endorsed the north's political structure but attacked its religious establishment. Both J and E appear to have been written between 922 and 722 BCE. Shortly after the fall of the north to the Assyrians in 722 and during Hezekiah's reign in the south, J and E were spliced or *redacted* together into a single document as a conciliation to the northern Israelites who had

migrated to Judah. In reaction to the influx of northern priests, the P source was created as an alternative to the JE story. One hundred years later, during the reign of Josiah, the framework of the D source was written around an old law code as a catalyst for religious reform. The D source is the first part of a larger historical sequence encompassing Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, compiled and edited by a single historian. The complete sequence of texts, called the Deuteronomistic History, details God's covenant with David for an unbroken royal lineage and rejection of local altars in favor of a single sacrificial site at the temple in Jerusalem. Finally, all four sources (JE, P, and D) were redacted together into the five books of Moses, the *Torah*, by a priest (possibly Ezra) during or shortly after the Babylonian exile.

From 300 BCE until about 200 CE, the notion of an official Jewish canon of scriptures was fluid, even after the council of Jabneh in 90 CE. Hundreds of religious texts appeared which were considered authoritative by many at this time. Although the authority of these texts was rejected by later Jewish scholars, even today they continue to have historical importance. These writings are classified into three collections: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and

Dead Sea Scrolls (the Dead Sea Scrolls will be discussed later).

The term *Apocrypha* is Greek for *concealed* and refers to thirteen texts which at one time were associated with the Jewish canon, but were officially rejected at the council of Jabneh. The original source of the Apocrypha is a Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures called the Septuagint (meaning "70"), so called because 72 Jewish scholars were brought to Egypt to create a Greek translation of Jewish scriptures between 285-246 BCE. Legend has it that each translated the first five books within 72 days, compared the various translations, and found them to be exactly the same. Completed around 100 BCE, the Septuagint contains the thirteen Apocryphal books interspersed among the other books of the *Tanakh*, with no clear distinction in importance. The thirteen books include Esdras 1 and 2, Tobit, Judith, the rest of the book of Ester, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, a Letter of Jeremiah, additions to the Book of Daniel (the Song of the Three Children, Susanna, and Bell and the Dragon), the Prayer of Manasseh, and Maccabees 1 and 2.

The term *Pseudepigrapha* means "writings with false subscriptions" and refers to a collection of 52 Jewish religious writings from 200 BCE to

200 CE, attributed to ideal figures in Jewish history such as Abraham and Moses. In literary styles paralleling those of the *Tanakh*, its four theological themes are the origins of sin and evil, God's transcendence, a coming Messiah, and the resurrection of the dead. The Pseudepigrapha is important in showing the diversity of Jewish theology at this time and the development of doctrines such as the Messiah, which are only hinted at in the *Tanakh*.

GREEK RULE AND THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH.

Although the final events reported in the Tanakh take place around 430 BCE, the religious drama of the Jewish people continues in post-exilic sectarian writings, considered scriptural in many Jewish circles at the time. The Persian Empire collapsed in 333 BCE during Alexander the Great's campaign for world domination. The next year Judea also fell under his control. After Alexander's death, the empire was divided between four of his generals, whose dynasties were committed to Hellenization, the propagation of Greek culture. Judea was passed back and forth between two dynasties of the divided empire: the Selucid Dynasty of Persia, and the Ptolemaic Dynasty of Egypt. From 301-198 BCE life was peaceful under the Ptolemies. Then it changed hands to the Selucids. By 165 BCE, the extreme Hellenizing policies of Selucid King Antiochus Epiphanes reduced central Jewish religious rites to capital crimes. For many young Jews their heritage became an embarrassment, as evidenced by a frequently practiced surgical reversal of circumcision. The Jewish-Greek rift was intensified further by the advocacy of these Hellenizing policies by Jewish High Priests themselves. Loyal Jewish writers sought a divine

explanation for this crisis which threatened their very existence. They wrote apocalyptic texts reporting vision-like revelations about a Messianic deliverer, a cataclysmic end to the empires of their oppressors, topped by final divine judgment. The Book of Daniel in the Tanakh is thought to be an apocalyptic work from this period. One of the most well known apocalyptic texts of this time is the First Book of Enoch, of the Pseudepigrapha. The work, written by several authors between 200 BCE and 100 CE, reflects traditional apocalyptic themes, specifically the role of the "Son of Man" who will free the Jews from foreign domination:

This Son of Man whom you have seen is the One who would remove the kings and the mighty ones from their comfortable seats and the strong ones from their thrones. He shall loosen the reins of the strong and crush the teeth of the sinners. He shall depose the kings from their thrones and kingdoms. [First Enoch, 46]

MACCABEAN REVOLT AND THE HASMONEAN DYNASTY.

The Book of Maccabees chronicles the clash between Hellenistic and Jewish culture. Written about 100 BCE and included in the Septuagint, the Book of Maccabees, is the primary source of information for this period of Jewish history. The ultimate Selucid assault against the Jewish religion was the erection of an altar to Zeus in the temple upon which pigs were sacrificed. Further plans were made to confiscate land from Jews who followed their traditions. In revolt, an old priest named Mattathias killed a commissioner who had ordered him to sacrifice to Zeus. Gathering his five sons and followers, he fled to the desert. From there his son Judas Maccabeus launched a guerrilla attack, recapturing Jerusalem, and restoring worship. Although the Selucid army responded to the revolt, the Selucids could not engage in a protracted guerrilla war, and ultimately recognized Judea as a semi-independent temple-state. The Maccabean leaders declared themselves a dynasty of Priest Kings, also called the Hasmonean Dynasty, and for the next hundred years engaged in relatively independent, although frequently despotic, rule.

The Hasmoneans greatly expanded Judea's borders and fortified key cities. It is probably during this time that synagogues emerged as centers for local religious education and worship. According to Josephus, noted Jewish historian of the first century CE, three religious orders also emerged: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. The Pharisees were priests and lay people who adopted a priestly life; they were proponents of oral tradition, purity rituals, a Messianic kingdom, and the resurrection of the dead. They were also dedicated teachers of these doctrines to the masses. The Sadducees were aristocratic and priestly rivals of the Pharisees, and denied many of their doctrines, especially those listed above. They also competed with the Pharisees for political influence in the Sanhedrin, the legislative assembly of Judea. The Essenes shared key doctrines with the Pharisees, such as food rituals, a Messianic kingdom and the resurrection of the dead. However, they became disgusted with the tyrannical rule of the Hasmoneans and the quarreling religious leaders, and established a monastic community in the desert along the Dead Sea.

20th century archeology has greatly added to our knowledge of Jewish religious life during this period, most notably in the discovery of the the

Dead Sea Scrolls. The Scrolls are a collection of writings and fragments discovered between 1947-1960 CE in the Qumran Valley area on the northwest shores of the Dead Sea. The religious community of Qumran was established around 200 BCE as a desert haven against the oppressive political and religious realities of the time, and was destroyed in 70 CE by the Romans during the Jewish revolt. The Messianic community was preparing to be joined by angels for a final war against evil on earth. Although the Qumran community is often identified with the Essenes as described by Josephus, its association with that or any other sect is uncertain. Scriptures of the Qumran community were discovered in 1947, and made fully public in 1991. The writings include the earliest copies of many texts of the *Tanakh* as well as an array of previously unknown religious texts. When first discovered, the new documents were thought to represent the unique views of the post-exilic monastic community. More recently, however, some historians believe they originated in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religious activity, and thus, like the Pseudepigrapha, reflect the broad range of Jewish scripture at the time. At least some of the writings, though, are specific to the community itself. The Qumran's Community Rule, for example, describes our dual human nature as consisting

of a spirit of truth and a spirit of error, which are the sources of proper and improper conduct, respectively. Reminiscent of Zoroastrianism, God has "established the two spirits in equal measure until the last period." Followers of truth, the Sons of Light, will ultimately wage a victorious war over followers of error, the Sons of Darkness.

ROMAN DOMINATION.

Hasmonean rule of Judea ended in 63 BCE when a civil war broke out between Jewish parties. Roman general Pompey was called in to arbitrate, but instead occupied Judea and declared it a Roman province. The first Roman governors were particularly brutal, enslaving or crucifying those who disobeyed. A cunning Jewish governor from Galilee, Herod the Great, was soon appointed King of the Jews in 37 BCE. Herod had non-Jewish ancestry and was never completely accepted by the Jews. Preoccupied with conspiracies against him, Herod built massive fortifications for protection. He also rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple on a grand scale. But taxation for these projects economically crippled the peasant population. After Herod's death in 4 BCE, the Romans appointed a series of governors who were insensitive to the religious practices and economic concerns of the people. Growing anti-Roman sentiment among the peasants led to a series of minor revolts in which thousands of Jews were massacred. Incited by an oracle that a Jewish messiah would rule the world, a territory-wide peasant revolt finally erupted in 66 CE. Although initially successful, the Romans marched on the rebellious Jewish territories, destroying everything in their path. Most

importantly, the elaborate new temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, bringing an end to temple sacrifices in 70 CE. Many Jews were sold as slaves, and the Jewish territories forfeited statehood status within the Roman Empire.

The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple was another landmark tragedy upon which Jewish writers focused. An interesting apocalyptic vision of this event is from the pseudepigraphic Sibylline Oracles. In Greek mythology, the Sibyl is a aged prophetess who predicts disaster while in an ecstatic state. The oldest Greek myths recount a single Sibyl, but by the middle ages writers postulated ten, each residing in a distinct Mediterranean area, foretelling tragedy at different periods of time. In Jewish tradition, the Sibylline Oracles are a complex patchwork of apocalyptic oracles written between 200 BCE and 600 CE which were pseudepigraphically attributed to the various Sibyl. The following passage was written about 80 CE.

An evil storm of war will also come upon Jerusalem from Italy, and it will sack the great Temple of God, whenever they put their trust in folly and cast off piety and commit repulsive murders in front of the Temple. ... A leader of Rome will come to Syria who will burn the Temple of Jerusalem with fire, at the same time

**slaughter many men and destroy the great
land of the Jews with its broad roads.
[Sibylline Oracles, Book 4]**

With the temple in ruins for three generations, in 132 CE Jewish peasants and leaders were easily seduced by the messianic leader Simeon Bar Kokhba, who promised to restore the temple. His unsuccessful three-year revolt brought more destruction to the country and a massive disbursement, or *Diaspora*, of the Jews throughout Europe. Jerusalem became officially off limits to all Jews, and the country was ironically renamed *Palestine*, after the ancient Philistines, arch-enemies of the early Israelites. With the Diaspora, the center of Judaism shifted from Jerusalem to Babylonia, where a large population of Jews remained after the 586 BCE exile. At its peak, one million Jews lived in Babylon in the years following the exile and restoration.

RABBINIC WRITINGS.

After the destruction of the Temple, the figure of the Rabbi emerged as an authority in scriptural interpretation and Jewish law, and for the next first five Judaism witnessed a dramatic flourishing of literary activity among Rabbis. One such was the composition of verse-by-verse commentaries on the *Tanakh*, known collectively and stylistically as *midrash*. Another and more important type of activity was the development of oral law, culminating in the texts of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*. Traditionally, the oral law of Judaism is believed to have been given to Moses by God at Mount Sinai, and orally transmitted for 1,500 years. In view of its divine origin, the oral law is on the same scriptural plane as the *Tanakh*. Historically, the foundation of the oral law tradition is thought to have been laid with Ezra's *Great Synagogue*, continuing through the Pharisees, and then extensively developed by the *Tannaim*, scholarly Rabbis who lived during the first two centuries CE. Although the *Tannaim* resisted committing the oral traditions to writing, in 200 CE the Palestinian Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi did just that. This work is the *Mishnah*, a collection of sayings attributed to specific *Tannaim* and Rabbinic schools from the first two centuries CE. The sayings are

stylistically rhythmic, which facilitated their early memorization. Much of its content derives from the legal codes in the Torah, although it rarely quotes the *Tanakh* directly. The text contains six key divisions: agricultural rules, laws governing the Sabbath and holidays, laws on marriage and divorce, the system of civil and criminal law, rules of temple sacrifices, and rules of purities and impurities. .) The typical style of the Mishnah is a give-and-take legal debate between the Tannaim. The best known section of the Mishnah is Abot (literally fathers), also called Wisdom of the Fathers. (This section was considered so important that medieval copies of the Talmud have Abot as the conclusion of each of its six key divisions). Abot is different in that it is a collection of proverbs by the Tannaim which are not debated. Abot opens listing the transmitters of the oral law from Moses to the Tannaim themselves:

Moses received the Torah at Sinai. He conveyed it to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets; and the prophets transmitted it to the men of the Great Assembly. The latter emphasized three principles: Be deliberate in judgment; raise up many disciples; and make a fence to safeguard the Torah.

Early Rabbis developed a tradition of commenting on the contents of the Mishnah. One collection, called the *Tosefta*, was written by the *Tannaim* themselves. After the *Tannaim*, two other groups of Rabbis continued commenting on the Mishnah: the *Amoraim* (from 200-500 CE.), and the *Saboraim* (from 500-700 CE.). Their comments became the basis of the *Talmud*, the grandest expression of this Rabbinic tradition. A first version of the *Talmud* appeared in 450 CE in Jerusalem, and a second and longer version in 500 CE in Babylon. Material was added to each version in the following century. Both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds have two parts: first, the text of the *Mishnah*, and second, the *Gemara*, which is a several-thousand page collection of comments on the *Mishnah* written by the *Amoraim* and *Saboraim*. Both Talmuds are structured according to the main divisions of the *Mishnah*, although the Babylonian *Talmud* covers more divisions than its Jerusalem counterpart and, thus, is more definitive.

The chief theological paradox of the Talmud is how collected opinions of early Rabbis can count as divine law. Although Judaism traces its oral law back to Moses, the Mishnah and Talmud

are, quite obviously, only collected sayings of the Tannaim, Amoraim, and Saboraim. Early Rabbis themselves were aware of this paradox and provide an answer in a dramatic parable in one of the most famous sections of the Talmud (Baba Mezia 59a-59b). A group of Rabbis were disputing an intricate point of Jewish law. One Rabbi, sought to defend his interpretation with a series of miracles. The opposing Rabbis, though, were not moved by this display:

If the law is according to my views, let this carob tree prove it. Thereupon the carob tree was thrust to a distance of a hundred cubits from its place, and some say four hundred. They replied to him: We adduce no evidence from a carob tree. Again he said to them: If the law is in accordance with my views, let the stream of water prove it, and at once the stream of water flowed in the opposite direction. But they said: We adduce no evidence from a stream of water.

Finally, with a voice from heaven, God himself confirmed the first Rabbi's interpretation. But the others were *still* not persuaded even challenge God's authority:

the Torah has already been given at Sinai, and we pay no attention to heavenly voices,

**for You have written at Sinai in the Torah:
"Incline after the majority"**

God laughed in response and said, "My children have won over me, my children have won over me!" The solution to the paradox of the oral law is that the majority position held by the carriers of oral law *becomes* the law. At that time, the sages of the Talmud were the carriers.

Typical of the times, women did not have equal religious status under Talmudic law. Although Rabbinic sages considered women "a nation apart" rather than inferior, women were nevertheless excluded from certain ceremonial rituals and from studying the Torah. Further, during menstruation and childbirth, women were considered unclean and were required to follow rituals of seclusion and purification. In other important ways the Talmud bucks trends of the day by acknowledging equal status for women under civil and criminal law, and insisting on monogamous marriages. In one such discussion (from the Talmud tractate Yebamot) a principal reason for marriage is that Adam, the original human, was created both male and female, and only later was separated into male and female bodies.

MEDIEVAL JUDAISM.

Babylonian Jews remained the dominant voice of Judaism until the Arab conquest of the region in the 7th century CE. In the centuries following, Jews of the Diaspora attempted to settle in communities throughout Europe, only to be forced out as host countries became intolerant of them. In the reshuffling, two distinct groups emerged, each with their own distinct language and religious rituals. The Saphardic Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal and moved to the Ottoman Empire. The Ashkenasic Jews were expelled from other countries and moved to eastern Europe.

An important theological development for Judaism in the middle ages was the cultivation of various mystical movements, most notably a form of mysticism called *Kabbala*. One of the earliest Jewish mystics was Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE.) who wrote a Hellenized, mystical commentary on the Pentateuch. Anticipating Plotinus, he believed there was a primary, concealed level of God, and two secondary levels: the logos, and the sensible universe. Union with God involves the awareness that we are part of the logos. *Tannaim* of the first two centuries CE, such as Rabbi Aqiba and Rabbi Ishmael, emphasized mysticism by describing visions of

the divine palaces (*keikhalot*) and the divine chariot (*merkavah*). This introduced a cosmic hierarchy into Jewish mysticism. A second century text called the *Shi'ur Qomah* (Measurement of the Divine Height) describes the limbs of the God as metaphors for his nature, and thereby offers a mystical investigation into the nature of God. In the fourth century, the *Sefer Yesirah* (Book of Creation) introduced the concept of the ten *sefirah*, which are ten emanations of God.

Since the 12th century, the most dominant school of Jewish mysticism has been Kabbala, which draws from all of the above expressions of mysticism. The classical statement of early Kabbala is found in two 13th century texts: *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of Brightness), and *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Splendor). The multi-volume *Zohar* was so influential that within a few centuries it attained the status of sacred text among Kabbalists. This epic text was written between 1280-1286 by Moses de Leon, a Spanish Jew from Guadalajara. The hero of the book, Rabbi Shim'on, a second century CE *Tannaim*, presents to his followers a verse-by-verse mystical midrash on several books of the *Tanakh*. To gain a receptive audience and lend authenticity to its content, Moses de Leon claimed that his work was a recently discovered

ancient text written by Rabbi Shim'on himself. For almost 600 years, Kabbalists took Moses de Leon at his word. The next major development in Kabbala involved a 16th century mystical revival in the Palestinian city of Safed which maintained that mystical union should be achieved by every person, not just specialists. From this revival grew certain messianic movements in the 17th century, and Hasidic mysticism in the 18th century.

The key doctrine of early Kabbala as expressed in the *Zohar* is that of the Sefirot, which are ten emanations of God's personality. These attributes of the divinity permeate all of creation, including our personal lives. The *Zohar* does not systematically discuss the Sefirot and typically does not refer to them by their formal names. Instead, it relies heavily on metaphors, leaving it to the reader to make the association. One of the more famous passages from the *Zohar* is an account of creation which is presented as a midrash on the first clause of the Book of Genesis, "In the beginning...." The passage describes how God, Eyn Sof, or the Infinite, created two primary Sefirot. The first is Hokhmah (wisdom) and is the primal point of God's emanation. The second is Binah (derivative wisdom) and is the prime mother

who receives seed from Hokhmah, and gives birth to seven lower Sefirot.

MODERN JUDAISM.

Beginning in the 18th century, Judaism evolved in several directions. The Hasidic movement was founded by Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760) as a mystical response to disillusionment in both Messianic hope (brought on by messianic pretenders of the previous century) and in Rabbinic legalism. Hasidism offered a more mystical and joyous approach to Judaism, particularly for the laity. Although Hasidim were at first persecuted by traditional rabbinic schools, eventually half of the traditional rabbis joined them. Followers of Baal Shem Tov were preachers, rather than theologians, and thus communicated orally rather than in writing. Their homilies were eventually put in writing by their sons or disciples. The Hasids describe God pantheistically, and maintain that God can be directly accessed. Another genre of writing also emerged from the Hasidic movement: the tale. These parable-like stories draw from events in peasant life and describe God more anthropomorphically, rather than pantheistically. The most distinguished of these are by the Ukrainian Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1810).

It was not until the 18th century Enlightenment that European countries finally granted civil rights to their Jewish citizens. As an outgrowth

of their freedom, Reformed Judaism was founded in Germany by Abraham Geiger in the 19th century. Geiger believed that Judaism should be confined more to the sphere of religion than to culture and that Jewish worship practices should be modified to parallel those of Protestant Christians. In reaction, the Orthodox denomination reaffirmed the traditional elements of Judaism. In an attempt to mediate between the reformed and orthodox views, the Conservative denomination emerged as an attempt to "conserve" historical traditions that the Reformed denomination had eliminated. Finally, in the 20th century the Reconstructionist denomination was founded by Mordecai Kaplan as a development from the Conservative denomination. Reconstructionists offer a more pragmatic approach in the modern world, placing more emphasis on the cultural development of Judaism rather than on its religious elements.

The Nation Of Israel.

The most dramatic events of Judaism within the 20th century involve the creation of the independent country of Israel and the resulting tensions between Israel and the surrounding Arab countries. From the 16th century Palestine was under the control of the Muslim Ottoman Empire and was largely populated with Muslim Arabs, with only a few thousand Jewish residents. In 1897 Hungarian writer Theodore Herzl (1860-1904) organized a movement called Zionism which advocated the creation of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine. Inspired by the Zionist movement, tens of thousands of Jews from around the world migrated to Palestine. At the close of World War I Palestine was passed from the hands of the Ottoman Empire to the British Empire. During the 1930s Jewish migration to Palestine jumped as a result of Nazi persecution when by 1939 their numbers reached a half a million, almost equaling the number of Muslim residents. Jewish presence in Palestine increased further during World War II, and at the close of the war revelations about Nazi concentration camp atrocities lent widespread international support for the Zionist movement. In 1947, the British handed Palestine over to the United Nations. The United Nations resolved to divide the area of Palestine into a

Jewish state and an Arab state, setting boundaries. The Arabs do not agree to a division, but in 1948 the Jews declared independence and took control of that part of the land designated by the United Nations. The new nation was called *Israel* and David Ben-Gurion was elected the first prime minister. United States immediately recognized its legitimacy.

For the next 30 years, Israel became involved in a series of wars with surrounding Arab countries in an effort to preserve its newly gained independence. In 1948-49 Israel fought a "War of Independence" against the Arabs, and expanded its borders beyond the original United Nation division. In 1956, Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez canal, and Israeli forces joined the French and British in fighting Egypt. The United Nations intervened, forcing the invaders to withdraw and Egypt emerged from this conflict as the official spokes person for the Arab world regarding Israel. In 1967, Nasser believed he could overpower Israel and end its existence. Syria and Jordan entered the war on the side of Egypt. In the resulting Six Day War, the Arabs lost quickly, and Israel took control of the entire Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the West Bank of the Jordan River. The defeat was a great embarrassment to the surrounding Arab countries, and in 1773,

during the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur, the new Egyptian president Anwar Sadat attacked Israel to regain the Israeli-held territory. The invasion was a surprise to Israel, but they ultimately push the Egyptian troops back. Failing to obtain his objective through force, Sadat adopted a more peaceful strategy of regaining Egypt's lost territory. In 1977 he flew to Israel and addressed their Parliament, and thereby became the first Arab country to recognize the existence of Israel. The resulting Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty (1979) required Israel to return the captured Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, which it did in April 1982. Although a diplomatic victory for both Egypt and Israel, Sadat's action was strongly condemned by other Arab countries.

With Egypt taking a more moderate view toward Israel, focus shifted to Arab dissent within Israel itself, namely the guerrilla war tactics of the Palestinian Liberation Organization headed by Yassar Arafat. PLO bases were established in the bordering country of Lebanon, just north of Israel, and in 1981 Israeli forces invaded Lebanon to attack the camps. The already weakened government of Lebanon collapsed, and warring Lebanese factions competed for power. Israeli troops finally withdrew in 1985. Continual PLO

pressure within Israel resulted in the creation of a Palestinian State in 1989 along the West Bank of the Jordan river, territory which became part of the country of Jordan in 1947, but was annexed by Israel in the six day war of 1967.

JEWISH RITUALS.

As noted, the religious festivals of Judaism commemorate events of their history. *Rosh Ha Shanah* is the Jewish celebration of the New Year, and commemorates God's creation of the world. It is celebrated for two days and marked by a ceremonial blowing of a ram's horn (*shofar*) during synagogue services. *Yom Kippur*, or the day of atonement, is celebrated 10 days after the New Year celebration and is distinguished by fasting and confession of sins. It was originally the single day of the year in which the high priest offered sacrifices within the inner sanctuary of the Temple. *Hanukkah*, which occurs during December, commemorates the reconsecration of the Jerusalem Temple during the Maccabean revolt from the Selucid Greeks in 165 BCE. It is also called the Festival of Lights, the Feast of Dedication, or the Feast of Maccabees, and is symbolized by the eight-branched candelabrum, or *Menorah*. *Passover*, perhaps the most important Jewish festival, commemorates the Exodus of the ancient Hebrew people from Egypt. Originally a pilgrimage festival, it later became an eight day festival. No labor is permitted on the first and last two days. During the first two nights of Passover, a ritual dinner meal takes place, called the *Seder*, which involves reading of

the *Haggadah* liturgy. Other noted Jewish festivals are the feast of *Purim*, which involves reading the scroll of Ester, *Shavout*, or the festival of tabernacles, and *Simhat Torah*, a holiday celebrating the completion of a one year cycle of public reading of the Torah

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CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is founded on the life and teachings of Jesus, a first century CE Jew who was executed by the Roman authorities for subversion. During its first few decades Christianity was a sect within Judaism, but quickly expanded beyond its Palestinian borders and Jewish framework, becoming an independent religion. Two elements of Christian doctrine are essentially Jewish. First, Jesus is the messiah, or anointed king, who is spoken of in Jewish prophetic writings. The term *christ* is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word messiah, and so Jesus is referred to as the Christ. Second, the message of Jesus is the kingdom of God. Keeping with Jewish apocalyptic notions of the messiah, early Christians expected that the kingdom would be established by cataclysmic events. A third element of Christianity departs from its Jewish heritage, namely, that Jesus is God in human form. Building on this, a fourth element is that, by his work, teachings, death and resurrection, Jesus became the savior of the world.

SOURCES OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

Jesus left no writings, and the knowledge we have of his life and teachings comes almost exclusively from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These narratives are traditionally ascribed to his disciples, but were probably written and compiled anonymously between 40 and 60 years after his death. They were also written by believers for believers, blending historical memories with early church teaching. Reconstructing an accurate picture of Jesus, then, is difficult, and, according to many theologians, impossible.

Scholars believe that for a few decades after Jesus' execution, the recollections of his immediate followers were transmitted orally. The first written accounts, from perhaps 50 CE, were simply lists of his sayings with no stories. None of these have survived intact. The book of Mark appeared around 70 CE, based on oral traditions of Jesus' life and teachings. Mark focuses more on activities in the life of Jesus than on teachings. His narrative is concise, matter of fact, and probably written for a non-Jewish audience in Rome about 70 CE. Since virtually the entire content of Mark's account is included in the longer gospels of Matthew and Luke (which use Mark as one of several sources), Mark's gospel was typically not the most

popular. However, as modern scholars try to identify the earliest recorded accounts of Jesus, preference is now given to Mark's narrative.

The books of Matthew and Luke appeared around 85 CE, both using information from Mark and an earlier lost list of sayings called *Quelle* (German for source). Matthew and Luke also contain unique stories and sayings, based on either oral traditions or earlier lost lists of sayings. Matthew's gospel was written for a Jewish audience, and it continually draws parallels from the Old Testament. The author of Luke was an educated non-Jewish Christian and, thus, his gospel reflects the broader non-Jewish implications of both Jesus' life and the Christian church. Mark, Matthew, and Luke are referred to as the synoptic gospels, since they give very similar accounts of Jesus' life and teachings. Finally, the Gospel of John appeared in 90 CE. Initially considered heretical by some early church fathers, it presents an account which is 90% different in content. The Gospel of John presents an account of Jesus which is almost entirely different from that of the synoptic gospels. In John, Jesus' ministry is three years, as opposed to one year; Jesus performs no exorcisms, Although Jesus performs miracles in both John and the synoptics, the purpose is different. In John, they are intentionally

performed as signs indicating his divine role, whereas in the synoptics, such signs are shunned and miracles are depicted mainly as acts of compassion. All four Gospels first circulated anonymously, and were only ascribed to the apostles during the middle second century. They have always been considered the most primary of all Christian texts.

JEWISH BACKGROUND

Jewish territories at that time were under especially oppressive Roman rule, which caused widespread unrest. Since the times of the independent Jewish monarchies hundreds of years earlier, 90% of the Jewish population consisted of agrarian peasants who supported the ruling priestly elite through taxes on their harvest. Additional taxes were imposed by the Romans, and still more to support local building projects, such as those of King Herod. By the time of Jesus, peasant taxes totaled about 40% of their harvest, which forced many into debt or sale of family land. Unemployment was also high. As the Romans reduced the size of Jewish territories, Jews from surrounding areas flooded into Judea and Galilee, the two principle territories of Jewish settlement. Occasional famine made economic times worse and intensified the rift between peasants and the ruling class, which supported the Romans.

Desperate peasants rallied around charismatic leaders who offered hope. Some supported social bandits who systematically robbed rich Jewish landowners and shared the wealth with the peasants. Others found comfort in the company of prophets who, in the tradition of the old Jewish prophets, pronounced apocalyptic judgment against the Romans and called the

people to repentance. Still others took refuge in the leadership of messiahs, that is, anointed kings. The concept of a messiah in Jewish literature did not become fixed until Rabbinic discussions after the revolt of 66. Prior to that, written discussions refer to a Davidic king, a prophet like Moses or a perfect priest, although the actual term messiah is rarely used. The notion of messiah in the minds of the illiterate peasants was somewhat different from that which appeared in the writings of the ruling elite. Although they retained the idea of kingship, they saw the anointing of this king as a revolutionary act of popular election. The messiah was to be a flesh-and-blood military leader, not just an apocalyptic figure waging spiritual war.

LIFE OF JESUS.

Jesus was born about 4 BCE. Two of the four canonical gospels give accounts of the birth of Jesus, each slightly different. Unlike Matthew, Luke begins by placing the birth story in the context of Roman emperor Augustus' reign. Jesus was raised in Nazareth, an insignificant agricultural city in the Galilee region. Little is known about Jesus until he began his ministry at about age thirty, during his association with John the Baptist, an apocalyptic prophet, who proclaimed impending doom. John baptized Jesus, and shortly after was executed by the ruler of Galilee, who feared that John's enthusiastic followers might provoke a rebellion. Jesus attracted his own followers in Galilee, who initially saw him as a popular prophet, rather more like John the Baptist than a political messiah. Of his large following of both men and women, later Christian tradition honored 12 as having special authority (although there is disagreement on who exactly the 12 were), possibly representing the twelve tribes of Israel. With his disciples, Jesus traveled around Galilee teaching, befriending outcasts, healing people, and performing exorcisms. He taught to both small gatherings in synagogues and to large peasant crowds in open-air places. His ministry lasted only a couple of years until he was

executed on a Roman cross. According to all four gospels, Jesus' supernatural powers were seen by the Jewish leaders as a threat to social and religious stability, inciting them to plot against him. The precise reasons for his execution may never be known. For John the Baptist, attracting large crowds in a revolutionary environment was enough to cost him his life. To the extent that Jesus appeared to be another popular prophet, Jewish and Roman leaders had reason for concern. Some scholars believe that after Jesus' death early Christians had to explain why the Jewish populace did not recognize Jesus as the messiah. Mark has an explanation which both Matthew and Luke adopt: Jesus purposefully kept word of his messiahship from circulating in order to minimize conflict with officials. Referred to as the messianic secret.

Jesus' final days took place in Jerusalem during the Jewish holiday of Passover. The four gospels depict Jesus and his disciples gathering for a meal, known as the "last supper" (Luke describes this as the traditional meal of the passover festival). At this meal, according to the synoptic gospels, Jesus performed symbolic acts with the bread and wine. This event is the basis of the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist. After the last supper, Jesus went with his

disciples to a hillside graveyard to pray. There he was arrested, brought before the Jewish legal council, and accused of blasphemy. Not empowered to perform criminal executions, the council brought Jesus to the Roman governor Pilate, where they made a case for treason based on Jesus' messianic claims. Pilate pronounced the desired verdict and sentence. All four gospels place responsibility on the Jews, first the priests and then an angry mob, although the ultimate decision rested with the governor. Jesus was then executed on a cross, in classic Roman fashion, and placed in the rock-hewn tomb of a wealthy follower. Mark's gospel reports that after a few days the tomb was found empty, and a young man present at the tomb announced that Jesus was resurrected. The other gospels report appearances of the resurrected Jesus.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS.

Like the events of his life, Jesus' teachings in the gospels also blend his words with early church doctrine. Some scholars argue that less than 20% of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were spoken by him. Matthew incorporates Jesus' sayings into five distinct discourses, possibly representing the five books of Moses, to symbolize a new Torah. The Sermon on the Mount is the first of these and, again, the mountain motif here parallels the story of Moses receiving the Law at Mount Sinai. Many of the teachings in Matthew overlap those in Luke, suggesting that they independently drew their information from a third source (i.e. the Q source). Thus, sayings in the Sermon on the Mount also appear in Luke in a section often called the Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49). Matthew's discourse opens with a description of how the kingdom of God will involve a dramatic reversal of conditions for the oppressed and faithful. Citizens of the kingdom must distinguish themselves through obedience to a new law, principally one of love for others, forgiveness, and trust in God.

The dominant message that emerges in Mark, Matthew, and Luke is the kingdom of God. The "kingdom" is never defined, but is the final state of affairs in which the world runs according to

God's will. Paradoxically, some teachings proclaim that the kingdom will arrive in the near future, while others maintain that the kingdom has already begun. Although the concepts of both a future and present kingdom of God can be found in Jewish apocalyptic literature, Jesus is unique in making the doctrine of the kingdom the basis of ethical behavior. Moral acts of repentance, love, charity, and nonviolence are God's requirements for acceptance into the kingdom. Because of the urgency in preparing for the kingdom, uncompromising behavior is required. Jesus did not see himself as the messianic ruler of the kingdom he proclaimed, especially in view of the military implications of the popular messiahs.

Along with its content, the style of Jesus' teaching in the synoptic gospels is also important: the parable. Most broadly, a parable is a statement, story, or dialogue which has a metaphorical or figurative meaning. It can be as short as a single sentence, such as "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25), or paragraphs long. Understood this way, almost everything attributed to Jesus in the synoptic gospels is in the form of a parable. More narrowly, parables are extended metaphorical narratives, or

figurative stories, about 30 of which appear in the first three Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas (see below). In view of their figurative nature, the parables require interpretation, and sometimes an early Christian explanation is presented within the Gospel text itself. The interpretation of virtually all of the parables, though, relates to some challenging aspect of the kingdom. Like much of Old Testament literature, Jesus' parables follow specific literary structures. For example, Luke 11:9-10 follows step parallelism:

A Ask, and it will be given you

B Seek, and you will find

C Knock, and it will be opened to you

A' For everyone who asks receives

B' And he who seeks finds

C' And to him who knocks it will be opened

Even the longest narrative parables follow a combination of various parallel structures.

The two most famous of Jesus' parables appear only in Luke: the good Samaritan and the prodigal son. Luke sets both parables in a larger